

**Superior Court of California  
County of Trinity  
Strategic Plan  
2007-2012**

**BACKGROUND:**

Trinity County encompasses approximately 2 million acres of rugged terrain steeped in the rich history of the California Gold Rush. It is located in the mountains of northwest California and is home to Trinity Lake, the third largest reservoir in California. The county takes its name from the Trinity River, named in 1845 by Major P.B. Reading under the mistaken belief that the river emptied into Trinidad Bay. In July of 1848 Major Reading discovered gold in the river he had named, and the “Trinity” became the destination of many 49’ers the following year.

Trinity was one of the original 27 counties created by the state legislature in 1850. At that time the county included a portion of present-day Siskiyou County as well as all of Humboldt and Del Norte counties. The rough and ready county seat of Weaverville was by then one of the largest towns in California. An awareness of the county’s pioneer history is reflected today by local pride in the 1850’s buildings that comprise a National Historic District in Weaverville, a local newspaper that has been published continuously since 1856, and the Jake Jackson Museum. There are still “no stop lights” and no incorporated towns or cities in the entire county.

The Trinity Alps Wilderness Primitive Area, situated in the northern portion of the county, includes peaks over 9,000 feet in elevation and scores of pristine alpine lakes and streams. The county’s geography of high mountain ridges and deep stream canyons presents challenges to travel and communication within the county. Having the longest unbroken mountain ridge in the world traverse our county tends to isolate, and insulate nearly 20% of the population from the county seat. Altogether the federal government owns over 75% of the land in the county. Numerous lumber mills and logging activities provided most of the economic base until recently, but today only one lumber mill remains in operation. Now state, federal, and local government are the greatest source of employment (45.6%), with only tourism (13%) providing a significant private economic base. In 2002 the annual average unemployment rate for Trinity County was 10.5 percent, significantly higher than the state’s rate of 6.6 percent for the same year. In Counties like Trinity, where recreation and tourism industries impact the economy, seasonal variations in employment are common and they often result in higher unemployment rates. The local economy is stagnant. According to 2006 estimates, Trinity’s current population is 14,000; population projections indicate that the number will remain fairly constant with 13,400 residents estimated for 2020.

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Since 1865 the Trinity County Court has occupied a two-story brick building that was constructed in 1857. Earlier uses of the building included a saloon and saloon-related activities. The courthouse building also houses the District Attorney's Office, County Clerk/Elections Office, County Auditor, Treasurer's Office, County Administrative Office, and the Board of Supervisors. Sessions of court are also held monthly in Hayfork and bi-monthly in Mad River; the driving time to Hayfork in good weather is about 45 minutes; to Mad River about 2 hours. All jury trials take place in Weaverville.

Considered a small court, Trinity is 1 of 15 two-judge courts in the State of California. The two superior court judges are supported by a Court Executive Officer, a staff of seven employees, a Marshal and two Deputy Marshals, one court reporter, and a part-time Family Court Mediator. An AB 1058 Commissioner and a Family Law Facilitator are currently shared with neighboring Shasta County. The court is in the process of expanding the services that we provide.

**VISION STATEMENT:**

Provide a forum to conduct the business of the court that provides maximum access to all, instills confidence in the judicial process and commands respect for the rule of law and our justice system.

**MISSION STATEMENT:**

The mission of the Superior Court of Trinity County is to work within the judicial branch and with the community to identify opportunities and effect changes that improve access to justice, public confidence in the courts and public respect of our legal system.

**GOALS:**

**GOAL I – ACCESS, FAIRNESS, AND DIVERSITY**

**Issue Statement:** Constituents residing in the distant communities of the county must travel up to 3 hours one-way under optimum driving conditions, over two-lane winding roads and mountain peaks to gain access to the courthouse in Weaverville. Compounded by the County's high unemployment rate and low average incomes, use of the court is a hardship for many community members. The Court must seek alternatives for improving access and ways to obtain input from our constituencies regarding fairness and diversity.

**Action Plan:**

1. Develop a stand-alone court website with feedback capability.
2. Implement the EZLegalFile Program.
3. Implement Fax Filing capability.

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4. Determine whether there are any areas in which the court is not in compliance with ADA; and take the necessary actions to be compliant and post information on the court website.
5. Expand the coverage for the Family Law Facilitator.
6. Establish a self-help center.
7. As a long-term goal, implement an interactive program to make payments online.

**GOAL II – INDEPENDENCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY**

**Issue Statement:** The issues of independence and accountability require a continuous effort to instill in our constituents an awareness of the judicial branch of government and the challenges facing the judiciary in the State of California. Development or acquisition of education materials and the commitment of resources are needed for communications appropriate for a large rural county.

**Action Plan:**

1. Commit resources to research and assemble educational materials that address judicial independence and accountability, and to attend conferences on these issues.
2. Work with the schools to determine whether it is possible to incorporate selected judicial website materials into required study and research projects in government, history or civics classes.
3. Work with the schools to incorporate presentations by the court into government, history or civics classes, and at school assemblies.
4. Make presentations to community groups.
5. Research and acquire articles addressing the current independence and accountability issues, and attempt to have these articles included in the local newspaper. Contact AOC to determine whether the AOC directly, or otherwise, could produce such articles expressly for publication in local newspapers.
6. Disseminate articles and educational materials available for public use at the Court's self-help center.

**GOAL III – MODERNIZATION OF MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATION**

**Issue Statement:** The Court is committed to continuous improvement in security, administration and recordkeeping, management best practices, and new technology in an effort to provide the best service to those who use the court. Because the organization is lean, the Court must plan and implement new programs and/or processes selectively.

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**Action Plan:**

1. Complete and implement a plan for security screening equipment, and develop joint protocol with the County for employee access.
2. Develop an Emergency Preparedness Plan.
3. Develop a Media Response Plan.
4. Separate H.R. and payroll from the County and migrate to the Court's Human Resource Information System (CHRIS), subject to the AOC's roll-out schedule.
5. Upload data to the new Fixed Asset / Inventory module in the Court's Accounting and Reporting System (CARS), subject to the AOC's implementation schedule.
6. Review and update local court rules and procedures, as necessary.

**GOAL IV – QUALITY OF JUSTICE AND SERVICE TO THE PUBLIC**

**Issue Statement:** The Superior Court of Trinity County is committed to deliver the highest quality of justice and service to the public; which includes respect and dignity for all who use the court, assistance for unrepresented litigants, court procedures and operations that promote efficient administration of cases, and professionalism that instills confidence in the judiciary.

**Action Plan:**

1. Develop a questionnaire to obtain feedback from litigants about their impressions of their court experience, specifically for those in Family Law, Traffic, and Small Claims court.
2. Develop a questionnaire to obtain feedback from prospective jurors and modify, if needed, the questionnaire for impaneled jurors about their court experiences.
3. Develop a questionnaire to obtain feedback from attorneys, law enforcement, the District Attorney's Office and other local agencies about their court experiences and suggestions for improvement.
4. Allocate resources to review the completed questionnaires, input data into a computer program to evaluate the information, and follow-up with comments as appropriate.
5. Pursue the feasibility of a professional survey of county residents regarding their satisfaction with the courts.
6. Provide training to all court employees for development and improvement of interpersonal and customer service skills.
7. Implement a "Continuous Improvement Program" that encompasses all aspects of the court's work.
8. Pursue the feasibility of expanding the Juvenile Drug Court to include hearings in other Trinity County communities where there are minors who cannot take advantage of the Juvenile Drug Court because of transportation limitations.

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**DEMOGRAPHICS  
SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS  
(2000 Census Information)**

<b>Population:</b>	13,022
Male:	6,644
Female	6,378

<b>Age:</b>	
Under 5 years	552
18 years and over	10,048
65 years and over	2,241
Median age	44.6

<b>Race</b>	Caucasian	88.9%
	Black/African American	0.4%
	Native American	4.8%
	Asian	0.5%
	Hispanic or Latino	4.0%
	Other	1.4%

<b>Income and Poverty:</b>	
Per capita (1999)	\$16,868
Median Household income (1999)	27,711
Person below poverty level	2,372
Annual Average Unemployment (2002)	10.5%

<b>Education (Over 25)</b>	
High School Graduates	81.0%
Bachelor's Degree	15.5%

**Financing Sources County Government**

Taxes	\$3,747,175
Licenses, permits and franchises	209,766
Fines, forfeitures and penalties	159,680
Use revenue (property and money)	320,176
Government agencies	14,657,959
Charges from current services	606,684
Misc Revenue	455,897
Other financing sources	517,253
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$20,671,572</b>